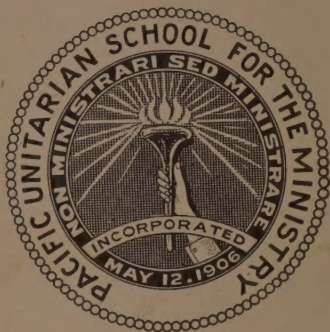


JOAN OF ARC

A NARRATIVE POEM

GEORGE H. CALVERT

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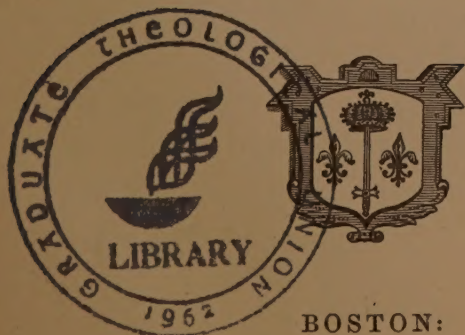
JOAN OF ARC:

A NARRATIVE POEM.

IN FOUR BOOKS.

BY

GEORGE H. CALVERT.



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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE transparency imparted to words by clear type on fine paper aids in the detection of that class of defects that are corrigible. So many such were thus discovered in the following poem (printed for private circulation in 1860), that in now offering it to the public the Author deems it proper to state that the pages as here revised are the only ones that are amenable to criticism.

NEWPORT, R. I., *December*, 1866.

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BOOK I. DOMREMY.

JOAN OF ARC.

BOOK I. DOMREMY.

I.

MAN's earthly being darksome rolls
In atmospheres of latent light,
Whence on his toil, through gospel souls,
Outstreams the supervisory might.

Before his footstep, straining higher,
Illumined pillars alway shine, —
The flaming of great souls on fire, —
Pillars half human half divine.

The Eternal Spirit breathes upon
Its filial race in all degrees :
But warms Egyptian Grecian sun
One Moses and one Socrates.

The like of these reverberate
Upon the finer senses speech
High whispered in their ears, elate
To be within such holy reach ;

Which seldom are the ears by din
Of power besieged, grown deaf thereby
Against the notes which then begin
When silent is the grosser cry.

Thence mostly bide the great aloof
From inspiration's breath, which stirs
Beneath the lowly toilsome roof
Of miners and of carpenters.

II.

BLIND was the time with hates and greeds,
With crimeful wars and ruffian raids,
Decrepit old the manful needs
Whence grew and throve the first crusades.

The Pope sold heaven for carnal cash ;
The Kings had earned no right of trust ;
The People was a thing to lash ;
And learning lent itself to lust.

The ear of France was faint with sounds
Of wail and woe, her will amort
With lavish losses and the wounds
Of Crecy and of Agincourt.

So shrunk her arm it nothing dared,
Her cities foul with mutiny,
The very soil will soon be shared
'Twixt England and false Burgundy.

III.

ALREADY kindled is the flame
To purge this peril clean away,
And glow around a woman's name
A marvel and a joy for aye.

In lone Domremy, on the marches
Of France, of Lorraine, and of Bar,
Her cottage cowered near the arches
Of hoary oak-woods, glooming far

In space and time ; for gaping Thought
 Roamed their dusk centuries, in search
Of nests for winged traditions, wrought
 Into the brain ere yet the church

Was consecrated, whose slow shade
 Hallowed her window in its fall ;
Then, touching calm the forest, made
 Evanish elves and fairies all.

Here, 'twixt the past and future rockt,
 The meditative Maiden leaned
Upon her peasant childhood, stockt
 With radiant reaching thoughts unweaned, —

Great thoughts, too great for utterance,
 Till, in the glow of visionary act
Full nursed to ripeness, hopeful France
 Shall bless them with her rescue backt, —

Thoughts born of goodness, which doth breed
The broadest and the boldest bred
In heaven or earth, the liveliest seed
In warm Creation's womby bed.

, IV.

GREAT Joan at first was only good:
She gave herself, she gave her tears
To friend and friendless, and did brood,
So young, on France's deepening fears.

That wild birds fed them from her hands,
Was token of her innocence,
Needed, ere Heaven its choice commands
Will lay upon the inner sense.

Only the great can do great things:

The greatness was ere they were done;
And long before Fame's belfry rings
For victory, 'twas inly won.

High chosen are the messengers

Through whom religious lightnings flash,
To illumine, when too blindly stirs,
Man's will in storms that madly crash.

Sway oft is lent to men of guilt,

But guilt heaps no creative gains;
The fast foundations aye are built
By Alfreds and by Charlemagnes.

V.

MORE subtile than belief can gauge
The lines that link our life to His;
But stronger than the whirlwind's rage
The finest of these subtilties.

In thicker throng than brain can breed
'Twixt heaven and earth the unbodied ply,
And, viewless, soundless to the unfreed,
They flash and hymn to the inner eye.

The advent of large thought the mind
Enwrapeth oft in terror, like
First flames from deep volcano's rind,
That rashly on the darkness strike.

When first foreshowing ravisheth
The vision of elected seers,
They trembling hope, as when through death
Man onward glides to higher spheres.

The shivering change is like the break
Of flowers through frost in spring, when veers
Upward the sun his warmth to make,
And they are freed in flood of tears.

The tender, pious Maid of Arc,
Who nursed the sick, whose thought was prayer,
Saw lights that made the noon seem dark,
So sun-surpassing was the glare.

And voices heard she, heavenly speech,
That came from angels 'rayed in white,
That came her fateful life to teach
In flashes of prophetic light.

At first she fell upon the ground,
 Bewildered, bathed in timorous tears;
But faith the coils of fear unwound,
 And she grew greater with the years.

Grew greater as her brain absorbed
 And throve upon the holy fire,
That to one end her being orb'd,
 Sublimed her life to one desire.

And must she forth to war and roam,
 So weeping loth to conflict she!
She loved her comrades, loved her home,
 Her mother, father, tenderly.

But newly fledged was bolder love,
 To country, right, and to her King:
Unpractised maid, unventuring dove,
 She pitched her flight with eagle's wing.

VL

SHE fled to neighboring Vaucouleur,
To loyal Captain Baudricour.
At first he chid, then mocked at her,
So mad she seemed, so peasant-poor.

“I am commissioned by our Lord
France and the King and crown to save:
That I am coming send him word.”
Sir Baudricour looked scornful grave.

This told, the King,—as one who waits
Upon the scaffold for reprieve,
And grasps at nothings in his straits,—
Commanded him to give her leave.

At Vaucouleur her saintly mien,
And words, and beauty, and the shower
Of light about her forehead sheen,
Had made the people know her power.

They flocked to front her eyes, and play
With prodigal hope returned ; and blades
Of knights outgleamed, to light her way
Through passes dim and scowling glades.

Good steed and armor they bestowed,
A sword and spurs and trooper's gear ;
And she, who horse had ne'er bestrode,
Sat like a Captain Cavalier.

The sky was glad and bells did ring,
And old and young bowed low to her,
As forth to meet and lift the King
She sallied from full Vaucouleur.

The gentle, trustful Maid of Arc
Rode fearless forward joyously :
Her comrades' bosoms soon grew dark
With dreads, and thoughts of sorcery.

"Be of good heart and cheer," she said ;
"Our guides are friends in Paradise."
And they were boldened by the Maid,
Their bad thoughts chastened by her eyes.

Nor English nor Burgundian swords,
Nor fraudulent Frankish ambuscades
Could compass her : she cleared the fords
And fens and brakes and scowling glades.

VII.

TWICE fifty torches shook their life
In arrowy showerings on the Hall,—
Like thoughts of genius, glistening rife,
That glow creative where they fall.

These fell on gold and gem and steel,
That flushed beneath the welcome dart,
And made three hundred courtiers feel
The pomp whereof each one was part.

The King he thought to dazzle so
The timid, rustic Maid of Arc;
But that she brought to which all glow
Of earth-lights is a vanished spark,—

Inward illumination, fired

By selfless longings, in a breast
So heavenly strung, in it are quired
The harmonies of courses blest.

Prizing the pomp as 't should be prized,
Erect, unblenching, angel-led,
She walked right to the King disguised,
And bent her knee and bowed her head.

“My King, the King thy King wills me
His instrument to have thee crowned
At holy Rheims, that France be free
Of foemen who profane her ground.”

Her instinct's eye that knew the King,
Her voice that tuned the listener's ear,
A spell that did her face enring,
Balked the glib courtiers' couchéd jeer.

The unointed King drew her aside,
And lowly speaking to the Maid,
His brow upheaved with wonder wide
At what the whispering Joan said.

A sceptred secret, pale with doubt,
Had harrowed long the royal breast :
The unworded torment she spake out
And put the rankling doubt at rest.

And issuing forth, with ribald breath
A soldier sought her ear to wound :—
“ Blaspheming, and so near to death ! ”
A moment after, he was drowned.

VIII.

OUR boldest thinking strives to hit
Beyond a finite circle's range ;
For law comes out of th' infinite,
And is to deepest insight strange.

And so far we have now been taught,
Slow climbing on from law to law, —
There's no new wonder but 'tis wrought
By rule that has nor breach nor flaw.

There cannot be of law a breach,
And what so seems is but a link
In chains that hang beyond the reach
Of present reason's furthest brink.

These seeming miracles, — where leaps
In startling flash the eternal fire,
That thrills the bravest pulse and creeps
Through faintest fibre of desire, —

Had never warmed the credent crowd :
'Tis only life that life can melt :
Herself, to holiest living vowed,
Made others throb with what she felt.

She wearied not of doing good,
And through her simple words and creed
Ran ruddy streams of Wisdom's blood,
Whose fountain-heart was daily deed.

IX.

LIKE misty mirror wiped by rays
Which then it gladly echoes round,
Are bosoms cleansed by goodness' blaze,
Reblazing it with health's rebound.

Befouled so long men's hearts had been,
That on them fell those holy streaks,
As the first morning's wakening sheen
On rescued night-doomed mountain-peaks.

But here the highest were not first:
The bruised many, earthly bare,
Were tenderer to a light that burst
From heaven, — Faith fathered by Despair.

And women's flashing instincts leapt
 Into the truth of Joan's look :
With her they prayed and warmly wept,
 And sweet heart-incense on her shook.

The King convoked judicial priests
 And doctors on the maiden youth, —
One of those supersubtle feasts
 Where sophistries benibble truth.

She foiled her greedy questioners,
 And beacon-bishops took her side,
Pronouncing that the right was hers,
 And she a heaven-enabled guide.

The people's faith, true Orleans' need,
 The Council's voice, the wide alarms,
So wrought, the wavering King decreed
 Her Captain o'er his men of arms.

BOOK II. ORLEANS.

BOOK II. ORLEANS.



I.

ON that new morning rose in France,
Flusht with a high expectancy,
An April sun, his swayful glance
Darting hot life from sea to sea.

More festive shone the blue than wont,
The birds prophetic joy did pipe,
And waters leapt in stillest font,
And blossoms burst that were not ripe.

The sunbeams on embattled steel
Clashed like the stroke of myriad swords,
And the glad clarion's muster-peal
Rang vauntful with sonorous words,

As in pure argent armor dight,
On martial courser glossy dark,
With sainted sword and banner white,
Came forth the warrior Maid of Arc.

Men's blood was wildly moved, to see,
With squire and heralds battle-'rayed,
In chieftain's pluméd panoply,
Ride forth the pious, prayerful Maid.

Erect she sat and vivid calm,
As one long schooled to leadership;
And so she had been, through the balm
Breathed on her from unearthly lip.

She rode enguarded by her worth,
By ministries of subtile hands
Invisible, and by the new birth
Of love and courage in the bands, —

The shrivelled roots in desert breasts,
(By war laid waste and misery,)
Rewarmed, as fledglings on their nests,
By pulse of feminine sympathy.

II.

THE crowd heaved towards her on the tide
Of hope and faith and joy reflowed,
And Captains hearkened at her side;
Yet she amid them rode alone.

For none could see what she could see, —
Dear France's fetters wrestled loose;
And none could feel and know as she
The means awaiting her high use.

But with her rode the powers that rule
In heaven and earth, and baffle hell, —
The judgment that events doth school,
The feeling that the self doth quell.

No princely promptings wily threw
Upon the ear of inward sense
Insidious baits, that suasive drew
Her thoughts to gilded recompense.

Within that vestal brain, whence shot
A mystic light the crowd that spelled,
Could sprout no seed of self, to spot
The brilliancies her bosom held.

III.

FROM royal Chinon rode she forth

Towards leaguered Orleans, where winged fame
Had with mere prologues of her worth
Fanned fainting hope to sturdy flame.

The haughtiest Chieftains brooked her power, —
Uplifted scorn chastised by awe, —
And feudal masters learnt to cower
Before a shepherd-maiden's law.

And still they gathered far and near,
Men who could sup on raid and wrack,
Saintrailles, Gaucourt, Coaraze, la Hire,
And the rough Lords of Armagnac.

And more than Fame's hoarse cry can call ;
None spirit-gifted, and not one
Had gained the mastering summit tall
Only by blest obedience won.

They scaled it never. Even the King
Chief over chief could scarce advance ;
And hence in part this conquest's ring,
Harmful to England as to France.

But she bore sway above the King's,
Of genius hers the right divine,
Whose lightning-loaded sceptre swings
High over Kingship's earthen line.

IV.

A SEA surged round her foamed with joy,
A vocal, vaulting, soul-lit sea
Of tremulous hearts, each face a buoy
Swayed by the swell of ecstasy.

They felt deliverance in her look;
Those grateful hearts, they read her right,
And long despair and anguish shook
Themselves away in tears of light.

Majestic meek she rode along,
With glad Dunois and tamed la Hire;
Behind them, twice one hundred strong,
A line of horsemen armed with spear.

Thought flamed his glory 'bout her head,
And from her lids Love poured his gifts,
As Silence locked the lips that sped
The generous promise that uplifts.

With awed delight the people gazed
In eyes where they saw heaven glassed,
And mothers gaunt their children raised
To catch a blessing as she passed.

And when with speech her visage burned,
It seemed descended sounds did break;
And wild submitted faces turned
As warm religious words she spake.

She alighted at the house of prayer, —
To keep unslacked the cord that bound
Her life to God's, the foremost care
Her thought on daily duty wound.

When came the hour to interrupt
And brace the day with tables heaped,
She passed the dainties by and supped
On bread in watered wine ensteeped.

And then to sleep she laid her down
In Orleans, where high guard she kept;
For knowing her within their town
Fearless the rescued burghers slept.

V.

BUT Fear and Hate were hatching then
In mirksome deeps their ghastly brood,
That brave unvanquished stalwart men
Be caged by new fright-haunted mood.

For that same hour on English dreams
Of Joan fierce lurid spectres cast,
As on still night-cloud fiery seams
Forewrite the shattering thunder-blast.

And Talbot, Suffolk, Glansdale, — chiefs
With whom success had grown to fate, —
Cursed the base craven blind beliefs,
That mixed so much of fear with hate.

Their soldiers' creed was sullied faith, —
Spring-currents drooping in a ditch:
Their pulse was seized as by a wraith, —
The inspired girl, they damned her witch.

For men are minions of belief,
Be it high or low; and being low,
They crucify beside a thief
The holiest that the earth can know.

In bodeful awe this churlish creed
 Enfolded Joan: she came to sweep
From Gallic soil their English breed,
 All who escape sepulchral sleep.

VI.

THE shadows cast on the orient gate
 Of Orleans from beleaguering towers,
No longer fell with gloomy weight:
 The Morn that sent them blazed his showers

On one who rose, the first of May
 Of fourteen hundred twenty-nine,
With robust dawn, herself a day
 That dawned, release on France to shine.

The eyes of Orleans, flush with strength
Of pious, tempering martial, glee,
Drew her through all the city's length,—
A second day of jubilee.

Then mounting on the rampart tall,—
So near the foremost English fort
That tongue could bridge from wall to wall,—
She hailed them with a queenly port.

“Lords Suffolk, Talbot, valiant chiefs,
Ye war against the right, and fill
England as France with daily griefs:
Depart ye hence—’t is Heaven’s will.”

Thus venting words of wisdom’s truth,
Her voice’s cadence music-fraught,
The sinuous grace and glistening youth
Of her mailed pluméd figure wrought

On the azure of the approving sky,
She looked alighted from above,
One missioned by the unearthly high,
A herald less of war than love.

But Glansdale, unacclaimed by trumpet,
With accents steeped in rancor's pitch,
Answered and called her cow-herd, strumpet,
Crying, "Avaunt! accurséd witch!"

The prophet-Maiden quick replied:
"Spite of yourselves hence will you flee,
All who this week shall not have died.
But, liar, this *thou* wilt not see."

VII.

HER task she would at once begin ;
But others deemed, and Dunois chief,
'T were best, the ranks being yet so thin,
To wait from Blois the sure relief.

They chafed her with delays ; for she
Had the true leader's gift, to know
The worth of calm celerity,
That springs to clutch the deeds which grow

Just o'er the magic line that parts
The future from the now, where bells
Ring only for respondent hearts,
And drown with life Time's funeral knells.

She would not have old Time command her,
She the sure mistress of the young,
Whom she bade bide her will and squander
On her the tribute to him flung.

At last, their coming far espied,
She rode to meet them, passing near
To the English bastions, whence was tried
No sally on her escort's rear.

Again she marched with succors close
Under their bulwarks' heavy brows;
Again, unstruck his wonted blows,
The lion could not him arouse.

'Twas no familiar fear that held
From the brave shock those warriors grim;
But manful breasts were partly spelled,
And partly Suffolk reined them in.

Like famished tiger who in sleep
Nears the fat herd and whets his jaws,
But dream-imprisoned cannot leap,
And maddened bleeds from clenched claws,

With armless anger inly bled
Those haughty chiefs, to see the prey
Go scathless by, mysterious led
By a girl in broad defiant day.

VIII.

O'ERSPENT with toil, in the afternoon
To rest she couched her weary cheek;
But not unguarded slept, for soon
She started with a tender shriek,—

“My arms! My horse! Blood flows, French blood—
I see it dripping on the ground.”

Snatching her mail and helmet-hood
And flag, and mounting with a bound,

Away to the Burgundian gate
She sped, unguided, undismayed.
Less haste and she had come too late:
The French were flying disarrayed.

She stayed their flight, she rallied them:
They clung reheartened to her side,
Beneath that banner stanch to stem
And reflux make the stormy tide.

Those Englishmen, they battled well,—
When did they not?—and Talbot stout
Sought from his western fort to quell
Part of the foe; but they swarmed out

So valorous eager, he withdrew
 Tristful within his towered hold.
Into the French their leader blew
 Her soul, and they were angel-bold.

Hot and more hot the war was waged,
 The English from their fortified coop
Resallying, with despair enraged,
 Till came the last ensanguined swoop,

Led by the Maid, whose banner white
 Flamed o'er the field a quickening Sun,
And following which with frantic fight
 The fort St. Loup by assault was won.

Swift now were spent the fondled hoards
 Of hate, revenge, and all that wrecks
Itself in death, the victors' swords
 Choking with blood the vanquished shrieks.

Not one was spared, save those who fled
 Befrocked as priests, whom she concealed,
The victor-chief, whose great heart bled,
 So many dying unaneled.

IX.

As, maddened by the trampling rain,
 Mud-freighted mountain-torrents pour
Into a lake, its lustre stain
 And blot heaven's image from its floor,

On Joan's unstained pellucid soul
 That deathful rage so darkening swept,
Her eyes grew sick at slaughter's scroll
 And through their triumph anguish wept.

She smote not with her sword, and spared
Blood-currents when she could, the hests
Divine fulfilling meek, nor dared
To fathom them with reason's tests.

The ascending law of sacrifice
To compass she was yet too crude,
Nor could forefeel the boundless price
Herself must pay for France's good.

Life springs from death and thrives on death:
We grow upon a charnel-heap,
Where rottenness breeds sweetest breath,
And light wakes livelier from a sleep.

X.

THEY could not for they would not see
 (So wilful is self-dazzled sight)
That hers was that first victory,
 From her the new resistless might.

Those jealous chieftains, woman-shent,
 Would shun her wishes, pass her by;
She read their thought, and to them sent, —
 “Follow your counsels — mine will I.”

And well for Orleans that she did;
 For they beyond the river led
A corps (from her the movement hid)
 Where panic-struck their squadrons fled;

When she, quick crossing with la Hire,
Took the fierce forward foe in flank,
Whereat the French, uncoiling fear,
Drove the besiegers from the bank

Behind their screen of palisades
And parapets, o'er which with flood
Rage-crested rolling, thirsty blades
They slaked once more in English blood.

They forced her quit the field, where they
Would lie companions of the night;
For she had fasted all the day, —
The holiest of the long year's flight.

XI.

BEFORE she laid her down to rest, —

“Come early, much will be to do :

I shall be wounded in the breast,” —

To her chaplain thus she gave the clue

Of the great morrow, at whose dawn

She hurried with a martial crowd

To the eastern portal, where was drawn

Afront the bolted gate, by proud

Gaucourt, a line to bar the way.

“With or without thy will I pass.”

The Chieftain’s own would not obey,

But hand in hand with her hot mass

Efforced the gate, whence all in boats
Sped glibly to the southern shore,
To assail the fortress, fenced by moats,
A strong redoubt and cannon's roar.

So stoutly did the English fend,
The French lost heart. A ladder snatched,
Into the fosse she leapt to ascend
The rampart wall, when, sure despatched,

An arrow found her, and she fell.
Out sprang the foe to clutch the prize ;
But she on a swift-rallying swell
Was borne away amid their cries.

When trickling warm she saw the blood,
The woman from her eyelids gushed, —
The warrior quelled by maidenhood, —
But for a moment — then back rushed

The hero to her heart. She drew
That arrow from a shoulder fair
With untrained hand, (it had pierced through,)
Then rose and, self discharged, all care

She lavished on her comrades worn,
So faint with battle and defeat,
That Dunois, seeing them o'erborne,
Already sounded a retreat.

She bade him pause, his fear dismiss,—
“Let them an hour rest and feed:
Our foemen's fall is doomed, and this
The day that Orleans will be freed.”

XII.

AWAITING summer's liberal noons,
Close by a vineyard trustful lay;
Here, deeply craving instant boons,
The constant Maiden knelt to pray.

That silent solitary prayer
Was clean and clear as bluest sky
That climbs Mont Blanc's white topmost stair,
And warm as breath that heaved him high.

So luminous her visage grew
From inward light, that when she rose
And leapt into her seat, she drew
Men's eyes as when a wonder glows.

Now quailed the foe, who thought her dead,
And the joyed French upsent a shout,
On whose wild gale the wings were spread
That drove them on the stormed redoubt.

Thence Glansdale fleeing on a plank
The bridge was shot beneath, and he
Steel-cased, with other Captains, sank,—
And the death-bubbles all could see.

Like spring's young tide Atlantic-rolled,
Her warriors poured themselves upon
Their battlements with surge so bold,
That in a trice the work was done.—

That night in Orleans sleep was shook
Out of all eyes by joy, and clang
Of boastful bells, that would not brook
A transient cheer, but pauseless sang.

From soul to lip, from tongue to tongue
With awe was thrown her simple name,
And there by raptured hearts was sung
The prelude to a deathless fame.

XIII.

THOSE midnight revels sank in ears
Whereon the jocund pealings fell
Dismal as the last toll that sears
The sentenced culprit in his cell.

They sat around the council-board,
Talbot and Suffolk and their mates,
Scowling, that they must sheathe the sword
Or draw upon enangered fates. —

Night still perplexed Day's forward brink,
When vengeful eyes were on the strain
West towards the single uncrushed link
Of their besiegers' fortress-chain.

Ere sun could smite their dinted steel
The silent English bands were seen
To issue from the fort and wheel
Into close line with sullen mien.

This told to Joan, — who wounded lay
Unarmed, — donning a light loose mail,
She galloped with the broadening day,
And as the French were about to assail

The foe, her voice cleft through them, — "Hold!
Bestain not with a bootless blood
The Sabbath day. This front so bold
Means no attack: 'tis but the flood

“Of brave men’s will ere ebb their feet.”

Lo! while she spake they turned, and forth,
In order rankt, to slow drum-beat,
Grimly they marched into the North.

She led her comrades to their rear,
And on the plain whence Talbot trod,
In his unwilling waning ear
A loud thanksgiving sang to God.

BOOK III. RHEIMS.

BOOK III. RHEIMS.



I.

NEVER outleapt more moving blast
From Fame's far trump than when it threw
On Europe's deep resounding vast
The Maiden's exploits, peerless new.

'T was no brief earth-blast, for it bore
Great messages of high relief,
And swift from men's slow vision tore
The sensuous film of unbelief.

Men's thoughts were godless — they had lost
Hold on the stable lines that link
Earth to superior spheres, and, tost
Unsteadied in the sensual sink,

Deemed it their home, man's saving good,
His conscience, given in pawn to priests,
Who cunning lent thereon the food
That nurtures men to passive beasts.

As a fresh-bursting bloom of stars, —
Out-dazzling so men's common eyes
It would their thoughts through earthliest bars
Drag up to Him who sows the skies, —

The Maiden shone siderial strange,
And such great wonders 'bout her grew,
Of sense she balked the grovelling range
And heavenward mortal bosoms drew.

Old Merlin's whispered prescient dream
Now swelled to sounding prophecy, —
“A Virgin shall the realm redeem,” —
And the good Maid of Arc is she.

II.

FROM rescued Orleans to the King
She hastened with her victories,
In fearless forethought conquering
For France becrowned regalities.

The King was slow to think, and had
No vision for the future's blank,
And when she there the good and bad
Unraveled, he bewildered shrank.

She saw, — and she at first alone, —
By consecration would be flung
A sacred splendor on the throne,
And thence a wide submission wrung.

His Captains each had partial aims,
His counsellors so laggard dim,
Her plans to them were misty names
Illegible on space's rim.

Time's wrinkled children seldom dare
Unwrinkled paths, tied torpid fast
To staid routine; and silvered hair
Is the white livery of the past.

Nor can the younger even keep pace
With girded genius, who outruns
His own thought's light, through whispering space
A life-beam flashing with the suns.

“Use me while yet you may, great King,”

The Maiden said: “My parting date
Comes round within a short year’s ring:”—

A first forefeeling of her fate.

The sluggard King was moved by this,

By the strong under-swell still more
The Maid was heaving from the abyss
Of a great People’s aching core,

Which, quickened by a life like hers,

Felt her deep puissance through its own,
And, instinct-guided, never errs
As to its needs, divinely sown.

How soul doth answer soul, and might

Breed might, and one warm bosom tune
Millions to higher beat, new sight
Kindling old eyes in Truth’s broad noon!

Faith in themselves so stout was born
Of faith in her, in a few days
Men grew like pulse of slow-breathed morn
Now panting up meridian blaze.

III.

THE impalpable is ever best,
His subtlest is man's liveliest food, —
The viewless air that feeds his breast,
The unconscious life that heats his blood.

The clamor of the common voice,
The grumbling winds of discontent,
Seemed of King Charles to sway the choice;
But with the grosser vigors blent

Supreme the omnipresent breath
That whispers to th' unwilling will,
With ceaseless circling baffles death,
And ever wafts us higher still.

And so, all other counsels quashed,
The King and Court must yield to her,
Their creeping crook'd devices dashed
By Orleans' fleet deliverer.

And now began that laurelled march
To regal Rheims from distant Selles,
The heavens a glad triumphal arch
O'er feats as bright as story tells.

Like seas before a tropic gale
Onward the martial torrent roared,
Through ford and fortress, shout and wail,—
Fresh fighters in it daily poured.

Onward still onward towards the goal
Her joyous swiftness never flags :
As fleshly members lifts the soul,
With her the sensual King she drags.

Onward with victor speed she swept,
Great Talbot's self her prisoner ta'en :
Bravely the foe their life-blood wept,
Her path besprinkled by the slain.

Suffolk held Jargeau in her way, —
She carried it by assault; then Fort
Beaugency stormed; and with Patay
She quitted them for Agincourt.

IV.

THEY halt before the gates of Troyes, —
To the English and Burgundians liege, —
Where envy sucked its impish joys
From hope of an arresting siege.

A week's delay the French unmanned, —
Enhungered guests without a feast, —
While pompous Councils feebly planned,
Ruled by a forward faith-less priest.

Ere they resolved retreat, — which all
Save one, advised, — they summoned her;
While she, who had doomed the city's fall,
Nor longer would its fall defer,

Was tapping at their Council-door.

When asked — “Can six days win these towers?”

She said — “There needs not half of four :

To-morrow noon they shall be ours.”

Mounting, she waved her pennon white,

And as it shimmered on the wind

Brave thousands mustered with delight,

Ready to do her utmost mind.

This swarm boards, tables, fagots heaped

Into the fosse ; whereat, appalled,

The foe, — before the French had reaped

Their escalade, — a parley called ;

Then oped their gates ; whence marching swift,

No more assailing or assailed,

Thank-radiant eyes she soon could lift,

As of dear Rheims the spires she hailed.

V.

TIME's friendliest fervors seldom bore
To martial France so freighted hour,
As when that temple, holy hoar,
Breathed its old benison of power

Upon the Monarch, girt with lay
And spiritual peers, and dignities,
And colored pomp and solemn play
Of sensuous-sacred liturgies.

And as the gaudy regal rites
Unrolled themselves to saintly song,
Nor king nor priest nor gilded sights
Held the hushed gazes of the throng;

But she, in splendent maidenhood,
Whose presence all their bosoms thrilled,
Who foremost near the altar stood,
And the wide church with wonder filled;

Her great heart beating in accord
With music of the spheral dance,
Her thanks and praises to the Lord,
Her wishes with the King and France.

When ceased the pageant's ritual flow,
And blazed the King with forehead crowned,
On humbleness she slid so low
She clasped his knees upon the ground.

Then gushed in stream of sudden tears
Her deep benignant being, rent
By exultation, wherewith fears
Unconsciously with triumph blent.

In such high rapturous unison
The crowd's rough heart beat with the Maid,
Quick as the dew with risen sun
Glistened the church in tears arrayed.

She spake — “ My King, the work decreed
For me to do is done. O ! send
Me to my parents poor : they need
My help, and thither would I wend.”

VI.

'T WAS not to be, that filial flight,
Her only home the sinless blue :
Her simple name has grown a might,
And France's King doth claim his due.

Domremy lay beyond a flood
Whose waters she herself had loosed,
Their bellowing billows, black with blood,
Henceforth on earth her only roost.

No more a mother's ripened love
Shall feed her with its autumn balm;
Nor her warm teemful bosom prove
Young mother's first ecstatic calm.

No youth with her great look shall gild
The home his fancy's wealth has given,
While her coy boldness helps him build
One future for the two to live in.

Nor toil-earned joys nor sweetened care,
Nor the week's crown of Sunday ease,
None shall be hers, nor the loved stare
Of upturned faces at her knees.

Her woman's walk shall be a tramp
Along the soldier's gairish path,
Till she exchange the brutal camp
For the dim dungeon's tutored wrath,—

A dungeon round whose wall shall hiss
Exultant nations' rabid breath,
While kings and bishops crosiers kiss,
With thanks all bloodied by a death.

VII.

THE crowning made allegiance cheap :
Soissons, Laon, Chateau-Thierry
Gave in, each opening gates and keep,
As marched the King towards Picardy.

Far shone above the serried line
That pious banner dipt in light,
A moving fortress, being a sign
That Heaven marched with them for the right.

But she who bore it, she was changed ;
Her mood was sad, and oft she sighed.
Her angel-friends, were they estranged ?
Not so, or breathless she had died.

But shadows, from the future blown,
Upon her silence coldly crept,
And, with dark nearness heavier grown,
Her tenderest life-strings grimly swept.

As Indian in his boat, who feels
At night the current's quickened pace,
To whom a flash 'mid thunderpeals
Lays bare his helpless deathward race,

Light beaming on her inner ken
Through earth's o'ercharged incumbent gloom,
She saw, close yawning at Compiègne,
Her dread inevitable doom.

VIII.

BUT ere it came to this, moons waned
On discord, feud, and jealousy,
While she, though thwarted, still had gained
Bold battles with her martial eye.

And now once more the year was warmed
By nuptial breath of florid May,
When, where Burgundians thickest swarmed,
To sieged Compiègne she fought her way.

One morning in the holy house, —
Her vision by communion purged, —
With motions such as martyr rouse,
Thus spake she calm, by prescience urged :

“ Good friends, pray for me — I am sold,
Betrayed : my captors now are nigh,
To drag me through a dungeon-hold
To death, by English hands to die.”

With dread and wonder gaping wide
Were yet the ears her voice had touched,
When dreadless she rode forth to bide
The perils those strange words had vouched.

She led a sortie from the town,
And, shielding the pursued retreat,
Ere she had cleared the gateway, down
Portcullis dropt behind her feet,

Leaving her helpless 'mid the foes,
Whose circling spearmen quickly forced
Her cease from brave and manlike blows,
And captive made her, first unhorsed.

BOOK IV. ROUEN.

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I.

Hot were the spurs that sped the news
Of that day's deed to Bedford's ear;
And England's yeomen stretched their thews,
Freed from the cramping links of fear.

As for won battles they rejoiced;
Big bonfires pranced on flimsy piles,
And high *te Deums* loud were voiced
In crowded broad cathedral aisles.

Becrowned and mitred princes fling
To silent heaven quick joyful cries,—
The joy of tigers ere they spring,
While hells are leaping through their eyes.

The Church's claim to interpret whole
God's will, bred angry jealousies
Towards Joan, thence concord with the soul
Of England's aim and enmities.

Priesthoods were then, as now, a school
Of power and pride, and level ran
With the strong world, serving to rule,
Rule the chief test of every plan.

Swayed too was England by a priest,
There as elsewhere a sway accurst,
Of public guidances the least
Divine, and thence of all the worst.

The true priest's function is to obey,
And thus avouch, the voice that calls
To pious self-renouncement: they
Who rule, or long to rule, are false.

II.

ENGLAND must prove the Maid a witch;
Else on the crowning of King Charles
Heaven's seal is set, in power so rich,
Whether the lion leaps or snarls:

Good Burgundy sues England's aid,
Would trade his bales, would Brabant gain:
Lean recreant Anjou would be paid
By Burgundy with fat Lorraine:

The Duke de Ligny holds the Maid,
For purchase, tightly prisoner :
And Bishop Beauvais higher grade
Would compass through bad Winchester.

Around the Maid this web of lusts
Was grossly spun with spider-speed,
Not by short passion's fitful gusts,
But the monsoon of gainful greed.

England held all these hungry hounds
In leash to her revenge and hate,
She so through pride abased, her wounds
She sought to heal with Joan's fate.

III.

WHERE was the King whom she had crowned?

When those fell tidings struck his side,
Did he not pale — then red rebound
With heart of bridegroom for his bride?

Did noons not lighten with the swords
Outflashed to vows ten-myriad-tongued,
And earth shake, trampled by the hordes
That galloped to her tempest-lunged,

Led on by France's chivalry,
The Maid to save who all had saved,
From wrong to wrest the greatest she
Whom Fame on Story's front hath graved?

That generous thought should draw but blanks !

Alas, were lofty baseness less !

In this wide scene of glow and thanks

All is a cold waste wilderness.

Burrowing in trains of lust and pelf,

The vauntful Frankish chivalry

Was drunk with fulsome draughts of self ;

And for King Charles — sooner than he

Would burn with nobleness, will howl

Young kids. Among ignoblest things

His then inaction sinks, as foul

As aught on the foul page of kings.

IV.

COULD bolts imprison prayer and thought,
And fence the fields of memory,
A deadlier ravage had been wrought,
And quenched an infinite liberty.

As lightly black cyclopean walls
Around her closed with sigh-strained bars,
As on the earth Night's shadow falls
That opens wide the world of stars.

They could not bar the empyrean friends
But they her bosom's brood would greet,
And parley hold for saintly ends
With thoughts unblushing, memories sweet.

Of angel-guests the seemly mate,
 Within the ruthless grated stone
She sat, in cloistered queenly state,
 Upon her high interior throne ;

Too high for self to climb, and wear
 And soil the steps, whence momentarily
Blest messengers went forth, to bear
 Good-will and love to all that be.

But still she had despondent cares, —
 Cares for Compiegne, whither she sent
Her heart's whole crop with daily prayers,
 And would for that her bonds have rent.

V.

To England sold for kingly price,
The Maid was dragged to Rouen's tower,
To be there tortured in the vice
Of lawless, godless, rageful power.

A lonely dream of innocence,
Lost in a murderer's tangled brains,
A ray whose fleeting flash indents
The dark of snaky cavern's stains,

Benighted lamb's lorn bleat, that stirs
The blood of wolves in hungry den,
Was Joan amid her purchasers, —
High priests and chiefs and learned men.

Lord Cardinal Winchester, the Duke
Of Bedford, Warwick's puissant Earl
Were there, — lest Beauvais should be luke, —
To bait, rack, butcher one poor girl.

Their ruffians watched her when she slept,
They hung big irons on her legs,
Let none weep with her when she wept, —
To drug her with Despair's dull dregs.

VI.

CAUCHON, Bishop of Beauvais, his,
A Frenchman's, was the tiger's paw
To push their inhumanities
'Gainst duty, manhood, justice, law.

He, Beauvais, and the Inquisitor's
Pale vicar, sat sole judges, backt
By lay and spiritual counsellors, —
A court for death and murder packt.

They forged guilt nooses for the mind,
With crafty clasps equipt and springs,
With these about her life to wind, —
Keen, subtle, covert questionings.

Though dim to her their worst intents,
She snapped the slimy tortuous chains,
With answers of wise innocence
Confounding their insidious pains.

They asked — “Does God the English hate?” —
“Whom God doth hate or love, from me
Is hid; but this I know and state,
Outdriven from France they all will be.”

— “That you are in a state of grace
Do you believe?” — “If I am not,
I pray God bring me so apace:
If so, may I keep such blessed lot!”

One tongue there was, but one, so base
To ask — “St. Michael, was he drest?” —
“Think you our Lord” — with childlike face —
“Hath not wherewith to clothe his best?”

And more than once her plaintive tongue
Chastised their shameless rank abuse
Of judge’s speech, which from her wrung —
“Would you make me myself accuse?”

VII.

SHE smote them with her simple words ;
And not at Orleans or Patay
Were stouter battles won with swords
Than here with speech from day to day.

And she had humbled haughtiest hearts,
Had other Talbots captive ta'en,
So edged with truth her worded darts,
Her holiness so whitely plain ;

Had they not rallied from defeat
On fresh reserves of malice, pride,
And for each sophism that was beat
Two marshalled that as deeply lied. —

Then over the profound great face
Of Mercy shadows swept, and she
Reascending to her hallowed place
To weep alone, all suddenly

New darkness rushed upon the soul
Of that high crew, already dark,
But now so beamless black there stole, —
As from a devil-delivered ark, —

And crept into their pitchy breasts,
Monsters that cannot live in day,
Nor brook of sense or thought the tests,
Who there had quenched all human ray,

Had not been flushed that hideous night, —
As on mad storm-clouds tender lie
The promises of rainbow-light
From sun that sinks and seems to die, —

By radiance from the martyr-Maid,
A glow by spirit-beauty nurst,
With vestal fire so warmly rayed,
It for a moment warmed the worst.

VIII.

DEATH wooed her from his halcyon heights,
Sent inmates of his palaces
To whisper of their chaste delights, —
Veracious unbought embassies

Of livers from beyond our sky,
Large affluent heirs of lavish Death,
Whose presence teaches, that to die
Is but to breathe a livelier breath.

To win so great a guest, they broke
Their law of silence on her ear,
And in earth's accents plainly spoke
Of sure deliverance glistening near.

At first the senses pried for sound
Of scaling squadrons, and a ring
Of Frankish swords sad Rouen round,
Her shackles loosened by the King.

As noontide brilliance whets the eye,
The light wherein her longings dwelt
Gave them so fine a mastery,
That soon a subtler hearing felt

The upward pointing of the tones ;
Then soared they on as blameless wings
As waft the swarm of infant ones
That daily up to heaven swings.

IX.

BUT nether life entwineth roots
So close about the seedful heart,
That till full ripened fall the fruits
A rending 't is for them to part.

Young blood holds hidden in its streams
The spawn of giant plans and wants :
To spill it, wastes high germs and gleams,
As when a murdered embryo pants.

The soldier-Maiden knew no fear ;
But life was young in her, and she
Had many loves, and much was dear
That held her earth-tied tenderly.

And so, when to the sense were hushed
Her angel-voices, on the stones,
Where she lay cold and chained uncrushed,
Would creep those loves to warm her moans.

Domremy came, and from its spring
Outgushed far childhood on her brain,
And saddened there, pale wandering,
Like moonlight on a desert main.

Her mother's voice dropt in her ear,
As chimes of first familiar bells
The home-returning seaman cheer
Through deathful Storm's insatiate swells.

Swift as the viewless harnessed fire
That speeds a thought o'er continents,
Across her soul's homesick desire
Ran strange, as through a magic lens,

Her vast career to Rheims the proud
From meek Domremy ; nor with pride
Was she upheaved, but humble bowed
Before her greatness' rapid tide.

And then, — as in a harp uphung
A warm wind waketh tender tones, —
A yearning for loved legions flung
Sweet tremors through those stable stones.

Then visions of new victories played
Becrowned before a martial mood,
And in bright prophecies arrayed
The grandeur of her solitude. —

The agony of sleeping child
Who starts, entailed in serpent-coils,
Was hers, — in vision's sea inisled, —
Waking to chains, and the worse toils

By tortive cunning wove with threads
Of vengeance in that court, whose gloom
Was ghastlier than the maiden-dreads
Of her rude dangerous prison-room.

They could but kill, they could not tame
Or conquer her, or wilt her bloom,
Heaping upon her higher fame
By that which doomed themselves,—her doom.

X.

THE palsied air in Rouen's streets
So scanty furnished food for breath,
The life that plies the pulse's heats
Was chill with pallid hints of death.

All joys, all griefs, all fears, all hopes,
What dimmeth, what illumineth,
The thought that mounts, the need that gropes,
That day were shadowed all with Death.

Men saw him in each other's eyes,
And women felt him fill their own,
And children hushed their playful cries,
And let grave silence reign alone.

He scowled below each shiny casque
Of twice four hundred troopers grim,
Who joyed in helping do his task,
And on their heartstrings dandled him.

Beyond, ten thousand gloating looks
Watched him already, ere he came,
Peering presentient through the nooks
Of pitiless fagots piled for flame. —

She comes — she comes — the Maid of Arc,
From Orleans and from Rheims she comes
Enwreathed, she whom freed France shall mark
The highest who hath roused her drums: —

She comes for holy sacrifice,
To win her greatest victory,
Warding, at costliest earthly price,
Her soul's full truth and purity: —

She comes to die for France, and lift
Man's thought forever to the height
Of love's unselfishness, — a gift
More precious than her conquering might.

“O! Rouen! Must I die then here!”
Outgush of wonder and of awe:
Can wrong its crest unsmitten rear —
Hiss impious at His heaven of law!

She heaved a sigh — then wept and prayed ;

Then calm and beautiful her face
Grew strong serene, in power arrayed
Of faith, and love's perfusive grace.

Like light before whose coming part

The waves of chaos' surly sea,
She sat upon the felon-cart
Dragged through that lowering soldiery.

Their hearts ran hate, wherein they snapped

At what seemed her, — revenge's food :
The lusting ones, they only lapt,
Rage-blinded, their own being's blood.

Man's life no fellow-man can reach,

And hers had been in heaven on earth,
Held down by finest threads, whose breach
Will be a moment's pang of birth ; —

A pang, quick smothered by the smoke
That suaged the bites of gnashing flame,
Through whose red roaring, prayerful broke
A voice that sounded Jesus' name. —

Fresh loosened then a tender breath
Came whispering to that sated hell;
And thence, where they had willed a death,
Forgiveness with a blessing fell.

THE END.





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